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AUTHOR Carrasquillo, Angela L.
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ABSTRACT

The knowledge and training of 80 bilingual elementary school teachers in the areas of Spanish language, reading skills, and reading methodology were studied. The teachers met the following criteria: they were bilingual (English and Spanish), they were licensed and currently teaching in New York City, and they had been exposed to the teaching of reading for at least 2 years in public elementary schools. It was found that the teachers had a reasonable understanding of the Spanish language in terms of philosophy, history, phonology, lexicon, morphology, and syntax, and they showed slightly less knowledge in Spanish reading skills. They appeared to have minimum competencies in Spanish language knowledge and Spanish reading skills and were not well prepared in Spanish reading methodology. Self-report information generally indicated that training in Spanish reading had been inadequate. Teachers were able to partially identify skills such as word recognition, comprehension, evaluation and analysis, and the use of skills by grades and levels. Recommendations include the following: a teacher competency assessment program with a training component should be conducted, and a list of competencies for bilingual Spanish reading teachers should be developed and field tested. (SW)

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A Descriptive Study of Spanish Reading Proficiency and Training Among Bilingual Elementary School Teachers

Dr. Angela L. Carrasquillo,
Assistant Professor
School of Education
Fordham University at Lincoln Center
New York, New York 10023

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge and training of bilingual elementary school teachers in the areas of Spanish language, reading skills and methodology. It was conducted in New York City with licensed and experienced bilingual teachers.

A questionnaire was administered to 80 bilingual teachers responsible for instructing reading in Spanish. The study found that bilingual teachers demonstrated an acceptable knowledge of Spanish language and Spanish reading skills. However, they had weak backgrounds in Spanish reading methodology. Their previous training varied widely, and they expressed the need for more training in the three areas explored, especially reading methodology.

A Descriptive Study of Spanish Reading Proficiency and Training Among Bilingual Elementary School Teachers

In 1977, the following resolution was adopted by the New York City Board of Education members:

> It is the policy of the Board of Education of the City of New York that every child be afforded equal educational opportunity regardless of economic status, race, ethnic background, religion, or native language. This opportunity will be provided by encouraging where feasible the development of bilingual education programs throughout the City for children whose native language is other than English and whose English speaking skills are limited. Such programs will make it possible for these pupils to participate meaningfully in an instructional program which enable them to learn in both cultures. The opportunity to study another language or to participate in Bilingual Programs where feasible should be provided for all pupils at some time in their schooling as a means of enriching their educational and life experience (New York City Board of Education, p. 1).

This resolution reaffirms the commitment of New York City educators to bilingual education since it focusses on the utilization of the students' native language as a medium of instruction for those who are unable to function in English. It has been generally assumed that spanish speaking students should learn to read first in the language he has acquired at home since he has mastered most of the Spanish sounds, and the general semantic and grammatical features of the Spanish language. (Anderson, 1974; Cornejo, 1974; Goodman, 1979; Modiano, 1966; Saville Troike, 1970; Thonis, 1976). Moreover, through his primary language he has learned to organize his environment and to obtain meaning from his personal experience.

Teaching reading in the student's native language such as Spanish will probably prevent retardation of his cognitive development because the

task of learning to read and write Spanish might be satisfying and productive. Modiano, among others, voiced the need for reading in the vernacular language when she found that "youngsters of linguistic minorities learn to read with greater comprehension in the national language when they first learn to read in their mother tongue than when they receive all reading instruction in the national language." (Modiano, 1966, pp. 52-53).

Qualified, well-prepared bilingual teachers then, are needed in order to have an adequate curriculum presentation in the student's native language. Selection and training of teachers for bilingual bicultural programs should include a comprehensive knowledge of, and proficiency in, the student's native language and the ability to teach content through it. There is a dearth of information, however, about teachers knowledge of the Spanish language and corresponding methodology. Such information has become increasingly important because it is generally agreed that a bilingual education teacher preparation program should "develop techniques which help the students to extend their command of their first and second language in listening, speaking, reading and writing" (Acosta and Blanco, 1978, p. 11). Ramirez, Macaulay, Gonzalez, Cox and Perez (Center for Applied Linguistics, Bilingual Education Series: V, 1977, p. 65) noted that:

> ...there is a need to investigate the necessary requirements for teachers in bilingual education programs. At present, a number of schools of education are introducing degrees in bilingual bicultural education. In many cases, this simply consists of relabeling and regrouping courses already in the curriculum.

In the light of this situation, authorities in bilingual education emphasize the need to provide information relevant to the preparation of Spanish/English bilingual teachers pertaining to: (1) their language under-

standing as it relates to the phonology, grammar and lexicon of Spanish; (2) levels of reading comprehension; and (3) appropriate teaching methodology. Furthermore, a need exists to determine whether these teachers have received formal training in these three areas.

The study reported in this paper originated from the many complaints bilingual elementary teachers have expressed to the author over the last five years best summarized in these words: "We have not been trained in teaching reading in Spanish." Moreover, this empirical study gave the author the opportunity to address a new and challenging research problem of increasing importance to bilingual training programs and education in general.

The specific objectives of this descriptive study were: 1) to determine the extent to which bilingual elementary school teachers teaching reading in Spanish possess substantial knowledge or proficiency in (a) the Spanish language, (b) Spanish reading skills, and (c) Spanish reading instructional methodology, and 2) to develop a profile of the training received by these bilingual teachers in the above areas.

Method

Subjects. The population for this study consisted of elementary school teachers currently engaged in the teaching of Spanish language and reading in New York City bilingual programs. Eighty (80) bilingual elementary school teachers were selected from four sites in New York City: 1) A community School District in the Bronx, 2) a Community School District in Queens, and 3) two universities-one in Manhattan and the other in the Bronx--presently preparing bilingual education teachers. Twenty teachers from each

site were randomly selected using a table of random numbers (Tuckman, 1972, p. 200).

The criteria in selecting the teachers who participated in the study were: (1) teachers were bilingual with fluency in English and Spanish; (2) they were licensed and currently working in elementary public schools in New York City, and (3) all had been exposed to the teaching of reading for at least two years in elementary public schools. Variables such as subjects' backgrounds and years of experience were also considered in the data collection effort.

Procedure. A questionnaire was administered by the investigator to the 80 teachers. The content of the questionnaire was subdivided as follows: (1) Spanish reading knowledge or proficiency (Spanish language, reading skills and methodology), and (2) training in reading. For the purpose of the study, reading knowledge or proficiency referred to the range of teacher's information or understanding while "training in reading" refers to undergo certain direct instruction through workshops, seminars, college courses or individual tutoring.

The area of Spanish language knowledge covered aspects related to the functional definition of language and its use, phonology and lexicon, morphology and syntax, especially those related to correctness in speaking and writing. Specific questions focused on written Spanish accent, syllabication, verb tenses, characteristic sounds of the Spanish language, and orderly sentence structure.

The area of reading skills entailed the content skills to be emphasized in an elementary school reading program; word recognition, comprehension,

analysis and evaluation. Items such as identification of skills by grades and levels, appropriateness of skills according to reading content, were included.

The area of reading methodology addressed its characteristics, adequate strategies, and reading materials. Questions relating to the identification of Spanish reading approaches, relationship between reading and student background, methodology for the development of vocabulary, and specific content characteristics of Spanish reading materials made up this section of the questionnaire. Figure 1 illustrates the questionnaire structure and content:

Figure 1

Spanish Language Knowledge	Philosophy and History Phonology and Lexicon Morphology and Syntax
Reading Skills	Word Recognition Comprehension Evaluation and Analysis
Reading Methodology	Approaches Strategies Reading Materials

Figure #1: The structure and content of the questionnaire

The survey instrument was designed as a composite of attitudinal scales and factual knowledge sub-tests. The attitudinal scales were used to obtain attitudinal judgements or perceptions about the Spanish language reading skills and methodology, and training received in these areas. The respondents indicated their opinions or attitudes by making a mark on the scale. The factual information was gathered through true and false (30 items) and multiple chpice (30) questions. Forty items were devoted to

elicit attitudes from the respondents; 60 items probed factual knowledge.

A group of specialists in Spanish language, reading, and bilingual education research validated the content, types of questions, and level of difficulty of each item. In particular, two Spanish Reading specialists and two bilingual researchers were used in the content validity of the study. The instrument was also administered to a group of teachers in a pilot trial. These teachers gave the researcher written reactions to the questionnaire. Finally, a consultant, knowledgeable in the design and construction of similar questionnaires integrated all these recommendations in its final copy.

The final version of the instrument was mailed to 20 randomly selected bilingual teachers at each site. A self-addressed envelope was included. A period of three weeks was given to each teacher to answer and return the questionnaire. The researcher contacted all individuals who did not return the questionnaire and noted their reasons. The questionnaires were mailed at the beginnirg of November, 1978; by the last week of January, 1979, all questionnaires were returned to the investigator.

Results. The results of the data collection were as follows: the native language of the majority of the teachers was determined to be Spanish (82,5%); English was the native language of 16.3% of the sample. Only 1.3% of the participants expressed another language other than English or Spanish as their native language, as is indicated in the following table:

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Native Language of Participants

Native Language	Number of Teachers	Percent
Spanish	66	82.5
English	13	16.3
Other	1	1.3

Almost half of the total sample (33) or 41.3% indicated 1 to 3 years of experience in teaching reading in Spanish. The second largest group (23) were those who had 4 or 5 years of experience. Only 11.3% (9) of the teachers did not have any experience at all in the teaching of Spanish reading (see table 2).

Table 2

Years of Experience of Participants in Teaching Spanish Reading

Years of Experience	Number of Teachers	Percent
No experience	9	11.3
1 to 3 years	33	41.3
4 to 5 years	23	28.8
Over 5 years	15	18.8

In the category of "proficiency of Spanish language" it was found that 29 teachers responded to 71% - 75% correct answers. However, it was also determined that very few teachers (4) scored 92% or higher. The mean for the group (N = 80) was 73 and the mode was 75.

The results of the second category "knowledge of Spanish reading skills" were similar to those determined for category one. Thirty seven teachers responded to 67% - 73% of correct answers. Approximately 32% (26 teachers) of the total sample obtained less than 60% of the correct answers. It was also found that only 1 teacher scored higher than 90%. The mean score for responses in this second category was 68 and the mode was 73. Results showed a slightly less knowledge of the skills than of the language.

The third category "knowledge of Spanish methodology" (approaches, strategies, reading materials) was the area in which teachers showed more difficultues or weaknesses. Results show that 31 teachers responded to 57% - 62% of correct answers. Approximately 25% (22 teachers) scored less than 52% of the correct answers. Only one teacher scored 90% or higher . The mean for teacher responses in this category was 60 and the mode was 57. The following table represent a summary of the above analysis.

thirty four (34 = 42.5%) were in total agreement; eleven (11 = 13.8%) were mostly in agreement; twelve (12 = 15.0%) were partly in agreement; eleven (11 = 13.8%) were mostly in disagreement; and twelve (12 = 15.0%) were in total disagreement with this statement.

In response to the statement that they had not received any training in Spanish reading methodology, twenty three (23 = 28%) were in total agreement; fourteen (14 = 17.5%) were mostly in agreement; fourteen were partly in agreement (14 = 17.5%); ten (10 = 12.5%) were mostly in disagreement; and nineteen (19 = 23.8%) were in total disagreement with this statement.

In response to the statement that the school district has offered training in the teaching of Spanish reading, nineteen (19 = 23.8%) were in total agreement; ten (10 - 12.5%) were mostly in agreement; ten (10 = 12.5%) were partly in agreement; ten (10 = 12.5%) were mostly in disagreement and thirty one (31 = 38%) were in total disagreement with this statement. Table 4 illustrates the kind of questions asked and the responses given by the 80 teachers.

Table 4

Sample Training Profile

N - 80 = 100%	Total Agree	Mostly Agree	Partly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Total Disagreement
Knowledge of Spanish language was acquired primarily in college courses.	10 (12.5%)	12 (15%)	17 (21.3%)	12 (15%)	29 (36.3%)
Knowledge of the reading process and the skills to be emphasized was acquired by self investigation.	23 (28.8%)	35 (43.8%)	14 (17.5%)	2 (2.5%)	6 (7.5%)
Have taken college courses on the teaching of Spanish reading.	34 (42.5%)	11 (13.8%)	12 (15%)	11 (13.8%)	12 (15%)
Have not received any training on Spanish reading methodology.	23 (28.8%)	14 (17.5%)	14 (17.5%)	10 (12.5%)	19 (23.8%)
The school district has offered training in teaching reading in Spanish.	19 (23.8%)	10 (12.5%)	10 (12.5%)	10 (12.5%)	31 (38.8%)
Have attended workshops on Spanish reading level skills or approaches.	19 (33.8%)	15 (18.8%)	14 (17.5%)	12 (15%)	20 (25%)
The school district provides reference materials on Spanish reading methodology and literature.	16 (20%)	8 (10%)	5 (6.3%)	11 (8%)	40 (50%)

Table 4 (Continued)

Sample Training Profile

N = 80 = 100%	Total Agree	Mostly Agree	Partly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Total Disagreement
The district supervisor offered training or materials on adequate use and selection of Spanish readers.	17 (21.3%)	9 (11.3%)	21 (26.3%)	6 (7.5%)	27 (33.8%)

Based on these results, these tentative conclusions can be made: bilingual teachers, scored higher in the knowledge of Spanish language, that the second higher score was reading skills, and the lowest scores were in reading methodology.

Discussion

The size of sample used in this study (N = 80) enabled the researcher in making some tentative conclusions. Analysis of the data presented on Objective One indicates the level of knowledge of bilingual teachers in Spanish language, reading skills and methodology. It can be concluded that: (1) the subjects have a reasonable understanding of the Spanish language in terms of philosophy, history, phonology, lexicon, morphology and syntax and (2) they showed slightly less knowledge in Spanish reading skills. Teachers were able to partially identify skills such as word recognition, comprehension, evaluation and analysis and the use of skills by grades and levels. They were also able to determine the skills function in relation to reading content. Subjects appeared to have minimum com-

petencies in Spanish language knowledge and Spanish reading skills, respectively. Efforts should be made to enrich these basic competencies.

Results showed that subjects are not well prepared in Spanish reading methodology (60.357). The reading methodology mean was obviously not an acceptable one for bilingual teachers who teach Spanish reading in the elementary grades every day. Subjects did not have a clear understanding of reading as a process and they can not distinguish among methods, especially when they are applied to Spanish. Subjects also need to improve their knowledge in identifying adequate reading materials. Based on these results, reading methodology is an important area for intensive in-service training.

Objective Two dealt with training in Spanish reading. The preparation and training received by the teachers varied. However, the self-report information, in general, indicates that the training received by teachers has been inadequate, and they have limited access to training resources. Areas where respondents expressed training concerns were (1) their knowledge of the Spanish language has not been acquired through college courses, although most of them have taken courses in Spanish reading; (2) they have received limited training in Spanish reading methodology; (3) the school district has provided limited training in Spanish reading; (4) the school district has not provided enough reference materials in Spanish reading; and (5) the supervisors have not provided enough training in Spanish reading.

These recommendations, then are made as a result of the study:

(1) A city wide reading teacher copetency assessment program is recommended with a comprehensive sound training component. It is likely

to be found that there is a reading deficiency in general among the school population, and that it is not only in the teaching of Spanish reading.

(2) A list of well articulated competencies for bilingual Spanish reading teachers should be developed and field tested. State Education departments, local city board of education and universities should be responsible for the development of these competencies. These competencies will serve as a guide for the hiring and employment of Spanish reading teachers.

(3) A Spanish Reading Task Force should be organized with the purpose of preparing a monograph on the development of adequate training programs, materials and activities for these bilingual teachers (e.g., courses to be taken, books to be studied, training modules that could be given in in-service training sessions).

(4) Institutions of higher education should revise their offerings in terms of courses and content. It appears that emphasis must be given to Spanish reading, especially in the area of methodology, and that more reference literature on Spanish reading should be provided to bilingual teachers.

(5) School district supervisory staff members must provide more emphasis to Spanish reading. More classroom observations and follow-up supervisory conferences are needed. Workshops on Spanish reading should be planned and carried out in a formal and systematic way.

These recommendations are only a few of the most important ones that can be made and if implemented, will fulfill the visionary policy of the local city boards of education pertaining to bilingual education and equal opportunity of education.

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